

Public Works Committee meeting of Tuesday, November 14, 2006 second floor meeting room, Town Hall  
time of meeting: approximately 7:05pm-9:35pm

#### Attendance

committee: Michael Cann, Vince O'Connor, Rob Crowner, Guilford Mooring (staff)

guests: Phil Jackson, Walter Wolnik, Hwei-Ling Greeney, Robie Hubley, at least 15 additional members of the greater western town center neighborhoods

#### 1. Lincoln Avenue/Fearing Street traffic calming

##### a. introduction:

Guilford summarizes the findings of the traffic studies conducted on Lincoln, Sunset, Fearing, McClellan, and North Prospect during 2006. Both speeds and volumes are significantly greater than would normally be expected for this type of neighborhood. Additionally, it appears that most of the traffic on these streets is "straight-through" in all directions - that is, it does not turn from Lincoln/Sunset onto Fearing nor from Fearing onto Lincoln/Sunset.

The DPW originally developed a proposal to make a one-way loop of streets north of Fearing in a counterclockwise direction from Lincoln to North Hadley to Sunset, and installing gates at the northern ends of Lincoln and Sunset. However, Public Safety officials were concerned about the affect of the gates on response time to this area.

Since the greatest single volume effect seems to be traffic leaving the University in the evening, travelling south on Lincoln, an alternate proposal to make only Lincoln one way, only from Fearing north to North Hadley Road, with no gate, has been made. It is anticipated that this would reduce evening traffic on Lincoln Avenue by over 600 vehicles.

##### b. reactions:

Vince would like to see analogous traffic studies done on University and North Pleasant before any changes are made, so as to be able to track possible effects.

Vince is concerned about the possible impact on the Amity/University intersection. Guilford notes that the DPW is working on a "plan" for University Drive that may include removing the traffic light at Amity.

Guilford notes that the flashing traffic signal at University and Massachusetts Avenues, a probable contributing factor to neighborhood traffic volume, is owned by UMass.

Vince believes that UMass is building too many parking lots and should be encouraged to put money and effort into creating and promoting alternate modes of getting to and from campus.

Hwei-Ling announces that UMass official Martha Nelson Patrick will be hosting a town-gown community meeting at 4:00pm on Wednesday in Campus Center room 903. Neighbors are encouraged to attend.

Neighbors relate that difficulty turning north onto University Drive from Route 9 and Amity (approaching from the west) likely causes many drivers to cut through on Lincoln and Sunset. Neighbors state that this is also true of Dana and Blue Hills.

Vince asks whether large truck traffic is a particularly important aspect of the issue. Guilford states that many of the trucks using Fearing are UMass vehicles avoiding Massachusetts Avenue and that many of those on Lincoln are contractor vehicles travelling to construction work on campus. Vince suggests that UMass should be petitioned to take responsibility for restricting these uses of these roadways.

Neighbors observe that student foot traffic is very significant on Fearing Street and request that vehicle speed be limited somehow. Guilford states that enforcement of speed limits is very expensive in manpower and money.

##### c. analysis of situation by neighborhood representative:

Phil summarizes the presentation given to the Select Board during the Summer that culminated in a request to implement an experimental dead-ending of Lincoln and Sunset at Fearing and which eventually led to the DPW proposal described above. The goals of the request were to reduce traffic volume in the neighborhood and to reduce the number of vehicle accidents that occur there, acknowledging that speed enforcement is not realistic.

Phil notes that the downtown roadways are "old-growth" - even pre-automobile - and are therefore different than traffic problems in neighborhoods developed later. He believes that the data that has been collected may even be understating the problems due to the placement of the devices and the reporting methods.

The request was intended to initiate an incremental approach to addressing the overall traffic problem that would be inexpensive, easily implemented, and easily reversible.

##### d. reactions:

Vince observes that an important aspect of the issue is the problem of getting pedestrians across Massachusetts Avenue without actually having them cross the street. The tunnel from Southwest is apparently nonfunctional.

Neighbors state that reducing traffic volume will result in reducing speed, because it is the cut-through traffic that includes those speeders. Vince states that efforts to control speeding may be a useful assignment of a new mutual aid agreement between the Town and UMass.

Neighbors state that UMass needs to take responsibility in this situation. Vince insists on the value of maintaining good relations with UMass, in part to encourage the taking of responsibility. He reiterates a desire to hear from UMass before making any decisions.

Neighbors describe poor lighting conditions on these streets, exacerbated by headlights. Guilford recommends making a request to the Select Board for better lighting, but also notes that turning off non-mandatory streetlights is a traditional budget-cutting measure.

e. committee action:

Vince suggests making a broad set of recommendations to the Select Board. He is unwilling to vote for the DPW proposal by itself, without a broader context, and certainly not without consulting UMass.

Guilford states that the cost of the DPW proposal is "a couple hundred dollars" and is easily reversed later if necessary.

Michael observes, with regard to the role of UMass, that Amherst College is capable of making and implementing decisions a lot more quickly than UMass can.

Hwei-Ling states that the DPW proposal is set to be presented to the Public Transportation and Bicycle Committee after the PWC, and then at a hearing for the neighborhood before the Select Board considers it, which would not be before December and possibly not until January.

Vince agrees to compile the recommendations for the committee to discuss at its next meeting on Tuesday, December 5. Neighbors will be invited and will be informed of the committee's decision at the same time as is the Select Board and UMass.

2. Speed limits

Guilford states that the State controls speed limit regulations (and speeding fines) on ALL streets (not just state highways). There is a detailed process necessary to establish or change the speed limit on any particular roadway. Ultimately, a speed limit cannot be lower than the 85th percentile of actual measured driving speeds on the roadway. Highly congested areas have a de facto speed limit of 30mph, but this cannot be posted and enforcement is particularly complicated. Effectively, it is impractical and counterproductive to attempt to establish speed limits within a town, because they will generally turn out to be greater than the de facto limit.

Remaining members of the public and committee discuss various ways that speed may be controlled. There is no one way that will be satisfactory to all parties, and most or all methods lose effectiveness over time as drivers adjust to them.

3. Meadow Street Bridge

Guilford reports that there are still several pieces of the project that have not been completed. It will not be done until late next Spring, likely later than the contracted date.

Respectfully submitted,  
Robert J. Crowner